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The Music Machine

It woke him up again, as it did every morning, while the smoggy blue-and-tan hued daybreak filtering through and lighting his ex-wife's lace-pattern curtains, which, a year and a half later, still hung in his studio apartment window. They couldn't even agree on the same music, by the end. She kept asking for silence, something that made his skin crawl. The soft balm for his every-single-bleary morning was from the OXNOS-10 entertainer/organizer, which was always ready, and always powered on by the cordless power distributor in the building's basement. It was what people dreamed of years ago, a centralized oh-so-handly assistant for health and entertainment. Sensors for your vitals, ear implants for

your music, stories, virtual meetings, and a task scheduler.

“Its almost like you don't have to think at all anymore,” the late-night ads for the discount off-brand versions used to say.

“It knows you better than you do!” Which was true. Long ago the population was tracked by their hand/body movements, eye movements and pupil dilation, all profiled with the free DNA sequencing the government had handed out to help with each individual's genetic frailties. -->Safety First!←--

And, those profiles tailored the Music Machine now to your Haplogroups. It knew what genetic traits lent themselves to which hyper-personalized endless soundtrack to Your Life In The Modern World.

It seemed to play just what he wanted at first, but, in the end, was it really just playing what It wanted, from algorithms programmed by the off-world Cent-Trillionaires -- who everyone, in some sense or another – worked for? When you're feeling tired? Better and less distracting than a hit of coke, the “health sensors” in your back, chest, and your legs would detect it. Faster and faster, always more on queue and efficient, it would play customized “songs” tailored to get your endorphins going, based on collective past reactions to music of your sector of society, combined with data it had received from your very own input while you were listening in what you thought was your “free time.”

“There would be no down time time for you, payroll is only made if quotas are made!” She smirked, eyeing him as she poured herself another cup of coffee.

“You’re not supposed to be drinking that, Kathrine. Only allowed organic compounds. Then you get more in the “flow” with the machine, and work better during the day!”

“Shut up, Reuben. You’re looking more and more worn out every day from your “shrooms” and the other damn bioengineered ‘supplements!’”

--“Don’t crash my buzz! This is the modern world, I am a highly productive, well paid consultant. We’re not a bunch of yahoos sitting around listening to short wave radio, or listening to illegal, non-digitization-compliant cassettes of Meshugganistics demos, are we?”

“I’m off for my shift. See you on the Other Side?”

“Very funny...!” Reuben said, as she went out the door before it opened, making it creak on its motorized axis. Off to her damn supermarket checkout job. Why I married a woman with an IQ of 137 who couldn’t get credentials past an Associates’ Degree – and permission to work in the Safety and Harmony Administration, I don’t fucking know. At least we don’t have kids. “See you on the ‘Other Side,’” bullshit.

The Other Side, who their side was always not quite facing off with, seemed to be about half of the First World's population, everywhere and nowhere. How did the two coexist? What made them go on in their snooty way when the Algorithms

of the music machine supplied them both with their daily doses of inspiration? Of course, he didn't know any of them, but one, Aunt Sharon.

She would invite him over on Saturday afternoons and, sometimes, the old holidays. She would make him tea or coffee, plus home-made “Mille Fleurs,” and talk to him quietly about the times before the Singleton was enacted at the Great World Congress. Things were divided then, politically and socially, when “First World” was thought to mean just a part of our current hemisphere, and laws did not apply equally. With the start of the off-world colonies, it was thought that the chaos at home should end.

After all, with technological advances in the last 250 years, communications and data flow let worldwide rule practical at last. The highest, most advanced thinkers had logically proved there must be one power for the world, a noble New Aristocrat and his court, to rule efficiently, not with the slowness and messiness of democracies and republics, which had been failing one-by-one. This new ruler was dubbed “The Singleton.” It would be a new era of prosperity, out of the chaos and malaise ‘society’ had fallen into – with wondrous technological developments, as well. A nameless new society, which could forget the past and move forward, as it should be. It brought Reuben a living, and The Music Machine, which he bought on credit, knowing he could pay it off in time – time better spent once he had it...

The Music Machine took old melodies and harmonies, and took each note, the timbre of all notes at any given time in the old recordings, and made them new. New to technologically know better how to suit the mood of any given

moment. He started to think it was tailored enough to color any particular thought, and bend shape it to the Proprietors' will.

It was thought and said that Copyright in music was moot-- with only 12 notes per octave, every melody had been played, and every rhythm had been made. Therefore, the machine could be the answer to the top 40 problem-- “how can you keep people interested when the algorithms were so simple?” --work from previous songs and melodies, ones deemed “perfect” for their time. But could the machines completely tame this ancient way of communicating? Of course, they could, and they could be the glue to keep this society together – both sides of it. There was no equivalence, really, progress must go on, and a method to keep people in the “right” path of life was sorely needed. Pictures and video could be faked, but music got in subliminally, and was ultimately much more powerful.

“You're on the list/Where does the problem lie?” --It sang to him. The problem? How does he keep his sanity, keeping with the modern world, and reconciling the failed marriage?

He was a mid-level analyst with a government clearance... Everyone thought she would be, too. They had known each other off and on since second grade, when they went to the same prep school. Life seemed good, then. Until his father got so interested in his electronics hobby – The Music Machine. Just a simple idea, but what did it lead to? And like many inventors, his name is not remembered. He may not have wanted to be, with what the Machine had become.

It came at him, "She's no good/ she's no good" when they would fight. It knew what he thought --- or did he learn what it thought? "Why don't you just go if you don't like life with me?" he said.

"Do I not like life with you, or not like life with the machines? The enslaved people that used to toil on what's now our gated community used to make their own music on the sides of their porch, you know! You're a fucking modern-day slave, give it a try!"

A few days later she left permanently.

"If only I could be someone/out with you and havin' fun / away from her and havin' fun."

--A new theme he had been hearing. Who is that distant or lost love it had been singing of? It dawned on him that it may be the machine, itself. He put the Music Machine on diagnostic reboot and walked outside. Down the dingy green-tinted hallway, out the garden apartment door, and toward the old field hand's quarters by the river.

The Diddley Bow. He took an old broom's wire, straightened it out. He fixed the wire to two nails at the end of the post on the porch and added a piece of wood making it tense between. A handle from an old glass bottle he slid between the ends. You couldn't calculate the number of variations of notes and harmonics -- vastly more than twelve in an octave. Then there was movement of pitch in long and short intervals --- "You got to GOOOO" sliding from one note to the next, or

trilling on the last note, done by hand, not a pre-programmed vibrato (tremolo?)

The first voice (human voice) plus the second(the Diddley Bow) and it went ---

“You got to go/You got to go/for any reason/you are feelin' low/just reach out your hand, lord/We got to go...

No machine was controlling it. No corrections, all artifacts of human frailty left in, and it was never recorded, just a song for the wind, and them alone, but was it, possibly, for the woman his heart left so long ago.

He knew he couldn't stay there -in the old slave quarters, the remains of other people's misery from so long ago. He couldn't even get a job as a caretaker for the fleets of robots that work the fields now - various shapes and sizes to collectively fit their working function. He didn't have that kind of experience on his resume. But he had gotten A's in his Computer Science Minor. That was real systems coding, not IT work. Old programming skills, for established or ongoing projects...

And they're looking for programmers for The Music Machine.